

[PODCAST: Uganda's 'open door' policy tested amid crush of desperate South Sudanese refugees](#)

25 August 2017 – South Sudan, Africa's newest nation, has known no respite since fighting broke out last July, following the collapse of a peace deal between Government and opposition forces, sparking what United Nations agencies report as incidents of 'barbaric violence' carried out by armed groups, and a massive spike in the number of desperate people fleeing for safety.

Amid the ongoing violence, wide-scale sexual assault of women and girls, and the kidnapping of boys for forced conscription, South Sudan, while generally off the media radar, has become Africa's largest refugee crisis and the world's third largest, after Syria and Afghanistan.

The UN estimates that close to 2,000 people a day are crossing the South Sudan border into northern Uganda's Arua district and the number of South Sudanese refugees in the country has now passed the one million mark.

The majority are women and children who arrive exhausted and hungry, with little more than the clothes on their backs. Some of them even have their first meal at the Imvepi reception centre, after walking for days to reach safety.

Struggling to cope with the growing influx, Uganda, which has an open-door policy with respect to refugees, has finally reached 'breaking point,' according to the UN refugee agency.

For [this edition](#) of the *UN News* podcast series, 'The Lid Is On,' Jocelyne Sambira is on the ground in northern Uganda to meet some of the refugees, and listen to their stories of survival. She also looks into Uganda's innovative approach to integrating refugees into society and how this is impacting local communities.

AUDIO: THE LID IS ON – Mass influx of South Sudanese refugees threatening Uganda's open door policy. Credit: UN News

[UN rights office gathering info on air](#)

strikes in Yemen; urges protection of civilians

25 August 2017 – Reiterating that attacks targeting civilians are prohibited under international law, the United Nations human rights office today confirmed dozens of casualties in airstrikes on villages near the capital, Sana'a.

Briefing journalists in Geneva, a spokesperson for the Office of the High Commissioners for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)), Liz Throssell, said one of the airstrikes on 23 August hit the Istirahat Al Shahab hotel in Bayt Al Athri in Arhab district, destroying the second floor and seriously damaging the rest of the building.

“So far we have been able to confirm that 33 civilians were killed and another 25 injured in the attack,” Ms. Throssell said of the attack, which is being blamed on Coalition Forces.

OHCHR said the attack came moments after an airstrike on a nearby security checkpoint manned by the Houthis. There were no reported casualties in that earlier attack.

Also on 23 August, an airstrike by Coalition Forces hit a house near a Houthi security checkpoint in a neighbouring district, killing six civilians and injuring at least 13 others.

“In all these cases, in which civilians were killed and injured, witnesses said that there had been no warnings that an attack was imminent,” Ms. Throssell said.

Speaking on behalf of OHCHR, the spokesperson said attacks targeting civilians or civilian objects are prohibited under international humanitarian law, which also prohibits indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks.

“We remind all parties to the conflict, including the Coalition, of their duty to ensure full respect for international humanitarian law,” said Ms. Throssell.

OHCHR is urging the relevant authorities to probe the attacks in “credible, comprehensive and impartial” investigations.

In the past week, 58 civilians were killed in attacks by the Saudi-led Coalition and affiliates of the Houthis.

“This week’s total is more than the number of civilians killed in the whole of June, when 52 were killed and in July, which saw 57 civilian deaths,” the spokesperson said.

No 'worse place on earth' than Syria's Raqqa, says senior UN adviser urging pause in fighting

24 August 2017 – A senior United Nations aid official today urged the international community to do whatever is needed to allow citizens to flee from Raqqa, describing the de facto capital of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh), the "worse place on earth."

Briefing journalists in Geneva, UN Special Adviser Jan Egeland said the five neighbourhoods held by ISIL in Raqqa are heavily shelled from the surrounding and encircling forces, and under constant air raids by the Coalition.

"Now is the time to think of possibilities, pauses or otherwise that might facilitate the escape of civilians, knowing that Islamic State fighters are doing their absolute best to use them as human shields," Mr. Egeland [said](#). "I cannot think of a worse place on earth now than in these five neighborhoods and for these 20,000 people."

He urged members from the Humanitarian Task Force, including the members of the Coalition that is supporting the retake of Raqqa, to "do whatever is possible to make it possible for the people to escape."

The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) established the respective taskforces on humanitarian aid delivery and a wider ceasefire. They have been meeting separately since early 2016 on a way forward in the crisis. Russia and the United States are the co-chairs of the taskforces and the ISSG, which also comprises the UN, the Arab League, the European Union and 16 other countries.

Mr. Egeland went on to note that the difference between the situation in Raqqa and that in Aleppo or other besieged areas was that that UN had contact with those holding those neighbourhoods.

"There is not a two-way communication, and there seems to be a very deliberate policy of holding people, and using them as human shields. But this is the time to try anything to allow their safe escape," he said, adding that few people are leaving now out of fear of death.

More than 260,000 people from the northern Iraqi city escaped and are receiving aid from 50 concentration points. Inside the city, however, conditions are "very bleak" and "it is very hard to assist."

The senior UN official also noted the situation in Deir ez-Zor, the town where forces are encircling, and which is believed to be home to some 90,000

people.

Extreme caution now also there has to be exercised, not to make it in anyway worse, for the civilian population," he said.

Among other locations mentioned in his briefing, Mr. Egeland said it was "heart-breaking" that aid was not allowed in to Fou and Kefraya, as well as Yarmouk, the Palestinian camp near Damascus, as had been agreed, after parties changed their minds.

Earlier in the briefing, UN Deputy Special Envoy for Syria Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy reiterated Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura's support and appreciation for the international humanitarian task force, and countries who have worked with the parties to the conflict to allow in aid.

Mr. de Mistura is expected to brief the Security Council on political developments in relations to Syria on Wednesday, 30 August.

[South Sudan's leaders bear 'direct responsibility' for conflict, UN Security Council told](#)

24 August 2017 – A senior United Nations peacekeeping official today called on the leaders of South Sudan to show genuine political will to achieve sustainable peace in the strife-riven country, stressing that those whose long-time rivalry sparked the ongoing conflict can be the ones to resolve it.

"The conflict in South Sudan is a man-made conflict for which the leaders of South Sudan bear a direct responsibility," Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping El-Ghassim Wane told the Security Council. "But the same leaders can also bring the country back from the impending abyss."

He noted that the dire economic situation and continued conflict in the country have combined to create a dangerous and precarious situation for its citizens, and all that is needed is genuine political will to halt military operations, peacefully negotiate and make the necessary compromises.

"I would also urge the Security Council to pronounce itself in this regard. It is critical that the leaders of South Sudan hear the international community's unified demand of what is expected of them," he stated.

Tomorrow marks the second anniversary of the signing of the South Sudan Peace Agreement between warring parties – the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) loyal to President Salva Kiir and the SPLA in Opposition backing then

First Vice-President Riek Machar.

South Sudan, the world youngest country, which gained its independence from Sudan in 2011, has faced ongoing challenges since a political face-off between the two leaders erupted into full blown conflict in December 2013.

Despite the August 2015 peace agreement that formally ended the conflict, fighting and instability have persisted.

According to Festus Mogae, Chairman of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC), ‘little meaningful progress’ has been achieved in the implementation of the agreement, Mr. Wane said.

‘More than ever before there is a critical need for continued and close coordination’ between Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the African Union, the UN and the larger international community to leverage collective influence to bring an end to the suffering of the civilian population and help put South Sudan on a more positive trajectory, he stated.

IGAD comprises Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda.

Security situation remains cause for ‘very serious concern’

Mr. Wane said the security situation in South Sudan remains a cause for ‘very serious’ concern. The expected ceasefire remains elusive as military operations continued during the reporting period, mostly in Upper Nile.

In July, 136 access incidents were reported by the humanitarian community – the highest number recorded in any one month since December 2013.

Incidents of looting also spiked during July, with 15 incidents reported across the country. Of particular concern were the six major looting incidents of warehouses and trucks in transit leading to the loss of 670 metric tons of food meant for vulnerable communities in Eastern Equatoria, Lakes, Upper Nile and Warrap.

In meetings between UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and South Sudan’s key government officials earlier this month, President Salva Kiir and his cabinet members expressed reservations on the inclusion of some personalities such as Riek Machar in any dialogue process, Mr. Wane said.

But there was, however, an acknowledgement that sizeable communities cannot be left out of a process just because they were led by or that they supported a particular individual, he added.

While the National Dialogue has made some progress, it continues to be criticized for its lack of inclusivity.

Meanwhile, the Government and the AU Commission have agreed on the text of

the legal instruments for the establishment of the South Sudan Hybrid Court. They will now submit the legal instruments for approval.

[Flow of refugees, migrants to Europe slows but sea journey remains deadly – UN](#)

24 August 2017 – Fewer [refugees and migrants](#) arrived in Europe in the first half of this year, but the likelihood of dying among people seeking to reach Europe is still “alarmingly high,” the United Nations refugee agency today reported, calling for renewed commitments to protect people.

According to the report, [Desperate Journeys](#), an estimated 2,253 people died or went missing at sea, and at least 40 died on land routes at or near European borders.

“Taking measures to reduce the number of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe, without at the same time stepping up peace-making, development, and safe pathways is morally unacceptable,” [said](#) UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi. “We can’t afford to ignore abuses clearly taking place simply because they happen out of our sight.”

In terms of passage, the report shows that overall Mediterranean crossings fell sharply in the first half of this year compared with the same period in 2016, due mainly to a 94 per cent decline in people using the sea route from Turkey into Greece.

Meanwhile, crossings from North Africa to Italy have remained at around the same level as last year, The High Commissioner’s Office ([UNHCR](#)) said, adding that violence and abuse along the journey is rife.

“Many of the migrants and refugees who have reached Italy from Libya have survived dangerous desert crossings and abuses that include sexual violence, torture, and abductions for ransom,” according to the report. “At sea, the risk of dying en route to Italy is one in 39.”

Some 11,400 of those who reached Italy in the first half of the year were children unaccompanied or separated from their families, according to the latest figures.

Many arrivals, amongst them children, were victims of sexual violence or trafficking. In all, over 40 per cent of asylum applicants in Italy between January and June qualified for protection of some kind, the UN agency noted.

The UNHCR report also shows a rise in arrivals to Spain, with 9,500 people

reaching the country as compared with 4,936 in the first months of 2017 and 2016, respectively.